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C.R.: *Foreign labor, history*

A letter was received from a company of river bottom planters, which read as follows:

"If you have any inquires from Negro farm families from the drought area for homes, beg to advise we can use 30 or 40 families."

A visit was made to the locality on July 27, and the local bank contacted to secure information as to the location of the plantation and to get data on the agricultural labor situation in the county. The bank official was quite courteous and willing to cooperate, and stated that he believed the county had sufficient local labor to supply all needs * * * "if the labor can be forced to work." He stated that many Negroes who had formerly been excellent farm workers had been fed by the Government and given work on Work Projects Administration projects at what he contended was "high wages and short hours," and now these Negroes would not work on the farms from 12 to 14 hours per day for a maximum wage of about \$1 per day, without meals, which was all the farmers "could pay." He further insisted that only a farmer who had handled Negro labor understood how to get good results from working them. Upon inquiry as to the best methods for getting value from Negro labor, he said:

"Give him barely enough to eat to keep him strong, and just enough clothes to hide his nakedness, otherwise he will develop the big head and get the idea that he is anybody's equal."

After this interview, the trip was made to the plantation. The manager was overseeing the work of a hundred Negroes, riding through the field on horseback, which is a general custom on penitentiary farms and on large ~~px~~ plantations where large numbers of workers are employed. The overseer was quite pleased at the response to his request for the Negro families, but his attitude changed when he was informed that the Employment Service would first
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attempt to secure his labor locally, and failing there would then try to interest ~~the~~ labor in adjoining counties. He stated quite flatly that he did not want local labor, that it could not be depended on, nor would he employ labor from either adjoining county. He wanted Negro families from the drought areas, because he believed they would appreciate a "home," and would "put on good work without complaining." He was also of the opinion that the Government was "ruining the Negro" farm laborer."⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Survey of Farm Placement in Texas 1936 and 1937, pp. 50-51.